



**U.S. Department of State
Bureau of Educational and
Cultural Affairs
Private Sector Exchange**



October 17, 2022

Guidance Directive 2022 - 01

Exchange Visitor Program – K-12 School Accreditation

This Guidance Directive provides clarification on the definition of “accreditation” and the information sponsors must secure regarding U.S. primary and secondary schools (K-12) prior to the placement of an exchange visitor in the Teacher or Secondary School Student categories of the Exchange Visitor Program. The Department of State has previously accepted as evidence of accreditation letters from independent accrediting agencies. The Department notes that some state school systems in the United States do not make use of independent accrediting agencies. Instead, states themselves develop school quality standards and review and recognize schools through a formal, often annual, process.

Going forward, sponsors may obtain letters from the state school system recognizing the results of a state’s formal review/recognition process to assess kindergarten through twelfth grade (K-12) school quality in order to satisfy the regulatory requirement of accreditation set forth in 22 CFR Part 62. The Department will also continue to accept a letter of accreditation that recognizes a school meets certain standards from an independent accrediting body.

Accreditation:

22 CFR 62.2 defines “Accredited academic institution” as “[a]ny academic institution that is duly accredited by the appropriate academic accrediting authority of the U.S. jurisdiction in which such institution is located.”

The Exchange Visitor Program regulations require sponsors or host entities to be accredited in certain situations:

- Under 22 CFR 62.5(c)(6), applications for designation from secondary or post-secondary academic institutions must provide “evidence of current accreditation” in order to receive designation.

- The Teacher category regulations, under 22 CFR 62.24(a), cover “exchange visitors who teach full-time in accredited public and private U.S. primary and secondary schools (K-12), including pre-kindergarten language immersion programs offered as regular courses of study by accredited primary schools.” In the Teacher category, an accredited primary or accredited secondary school is defined as “[a]ny publicly or privately operated primary or secondary institution for educating children in the United States that offers mainly academic programs and is duly accredited by the appropriate academic accrediting authority of the jurisdiction in which such institution is located.” 22 CFR 62.24(c)(1).
- In the Secondary School Student category, the regulations afford foreign secondary school students “the opportunity to study in the United States at accredited public or private secondary schools for an academic semester or an academic year, while living with American host families or residing at accredited U.S. boarding schools.” 22 CFR 62.25(a).
- Under 22 CFR 62.25(c)(1), “[s]econdary school student exchange visitor programs designated by the Department of State must require all exchange students to be enrolled and participating in a full course of study at an accredited academic institution”

Documentation of state review/recognition as evidence of accreditation: As of the date of this guidance, the Office of Private Sector Exchange will accept the results of the academic accrediting authority of the U.S. jurisdiction in which such institution is located as a type of K-12 school accreditation, if the accrediting authority submits a satisfactory assessment of the school (public or private) during its most recent review cycle.

Applicants or sponsors must submit evidence of accreditation (e.g., letter of accreditation, letter from state authorities documenting state assessment results, etc.) as part of an application for designation or redesignation and to demonstrate all host school placements meet the accreditation requirement. The evidence should demonstrate that the host school meets the accrediting authority’s standards of school quality. The applicant or sponsor should explain the assessment framework the state uses to evaluate school quality.

The sponsor should be able to show that the school exceeds or fully meets state standards to demonstrate that the highest qualifications have been met. The Department views accrediting assessments as binary decisions, either a host school is recognized, or it is not. Host schools that are on probation, that are awaiting final determination, or that lose recognition status are not eligible to host exchange visitors. Sponsors must keep all records of academic accrediting authority assessments (or a screenshot of the ranking/recognition assessment from the state’s website) in the sponsor’s respective exchange visitor files in case the Department requests to see a copy, consistent with 22 CFR 62.10(e)-(g).

Per Guidance Directive 2019-01, approval of a change in the site of activity to another school or school district does not preclude an exchange teacher from extending his or her program. Although the language of the extension provision requires evidence of performance and cultural activities during the “previous three years,” only the exchange teacher’s current host school must submit a reference letter as required by 22 CFR 62.24(k). The letter should include the length of time the exchange teacher has been teaching at the host school.

Sponsors must annually verify that their host schools continue to meet the Department's accreditation requirements by securing all required documentation. This is incumbent on sponsors and should not impede an exchange visitor's ability to continue his/her exchange program. Should a prior placement lose its accreditation or review/recognition status during an exchange visitor's program, sponsors must present the exchange visitor an opportunity to transfer to a new placement at an accredited school, but the exchange visitor may not be required to do so if it proves overly burdensome for the exchange visitor.

Exchange visitors in the Teacher category interested in applying to extend their program should have the opportunity to transfer to a duly accredited or reviewed/recognized school if their current host school has lost its accreditation or review/recognition status.

If you have questions about this directive or host school eligibility in general, please contact the Office of Private Sector Exchange Designation at JVisas@state.gov.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nicole Elkon". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Nicole Elkon
Deputy Assistant Secretary
for Private Sector Exchange